



Steve

Beverly

Hi! How you?

This reminds me of what used to happen when game shows would be canceled, then return a couple of years later in a new format.

This is not *The New Matwatch*, *All-Star Matwatch*, *Super Matwatch*, or *Matwatch P.M.* But to distinguish it from our previous venture, we will heretofore add the year of its publication, whatever its endurance.

We are not out to break subscription records with this venture. To be honest, while the newsletter marketplace has become a bit less saturated than when we last visited, the overall interest in pro wrestling continues to shrink (see *King-of-the-Ring* and *Clash* numbers).

Candidly, I truly believe we are in the latter days of significance of the mat game as many of us know it, though the death may be a slow, painful one. For the life of me, I do not foresee a tonic, nor a catalyst which will suddenly retransform wrestling into the national conscience as it was, particularly from 1984-89. Wrestling has become a victim of its own excesses, as anyone but a naive analyst predicted before the '90s.

So why try this again? First, as one who has written about this genre of entertainment academically, I find compelling the apparent desperation efforts to save it, few of which will work. Second, I have a number of firsthand stories from behind the scenes--particularly from the often-incomprehensible WCW--which a few of you may find entertaining. Finally, whether we are actually nearing the end or if I am totally fooled by wrestling's destiny, I have a few comments left--some humorous, some pointed--as this skidding

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Wunderkind or Stephanopoulos?

The Bischoff Era: A Report Card

On the surface, when Eric Bischoff was appointed executive producer of World Championship Wrestling, howls of celebration should have aired. After all, he is what many pundits have demanded for years: young, a non-wrestler and---except for his supporting on-air role with the old AWA---a wrestling outsider.

Yet, with the exception of WCW chief executive Bill Shaw and the liberal Paul E. Dangerously, the book on Bischoff is a transcontinental call away from *The Way Things Ought to Be* as a best-seller.

Part of it is of Bischoff's own making; other elements are beyond his control. Yet, four months ago, when Shaw was interviewing candidates for the e.p. role---which in TV, anoints one as the guiding hand over budget, production values, graphics, music, concepts, execution and personalities for broadcasts---Shaw and his senior vice president Bob Dhue told applicants the executive producer was supposed to exercise control over the WCW bookers.

What, in essence, has Bischoff set in motion to put his personal stamp on the broadcasts?:

CLASH UPDATE

Clash of the Champions scored an all-time low 2.6 rating (the 4.7 share was up slightly from last June) and was the least-watched in history (1.549 million homes). Details on page 4. A full review and commentary in the July issue.

***Talked Shaw into dumping Jim Ross, only the top play-by-play man in the business the past six years, and---to viewers---one of WCW's few stable forces in five turbulent years of Ted Turner's ownership.

***Re-anointed Tony Schiavone, who presided over the steepest four-year decline in WCW ratings (59 per cent from 1985-89), as lead host of the flagship *Saturday Night* series.

***Moved Jesse Ventura to the *Saturday Night* broadcast, in addition to his WCW *Worldwide* slot.

***Initiated *A Flair for the Gold*, a well-produced feature segment; yet, often full of sexual innuendo and outright endorsement at the family viewing hour.

***Declared anyone with even remote resemblance to a Southern accent "will never get a job (at WCW)." In the process, Bischoff passed over the now-WWF feature reporter Boni Blackstone.

***Ignored the experienced (both at wrestling and mainline sports) Craig (Jon Horton) Johnson for a sorely-needed backup play-by-play role.

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Steve Beverly (Continued from Page 1)

journey hydroplanes. Regardless if you agree, I hope you will find them worth digesting.

This publication, candidly, is centered around what I think. As I said in the original issue of *Matwatch* five years ago, I will not talk down to you. Either through direct or disciplined thought, I will tell you my insights.

We will not be in a race this time to be first with headlines. There are other publications for that. *Matwatch '93* is monthly, rather than weekly, and as such is suited better to analysis and perspective, rather than a story-break competition. I simply do not have the time in my role as a broadcasting faculty member at Union University in Jackson, Tn., or compulsion to rejoin that battle.

Second, *Matwatch '93* will strive to be *The Conservative Chronicle* of TV wrestling. It is our agenda to hold accountable the various mat companies for their program content. If these industries seek to attract and market product lines toward children and teens, we will stick a written foot in their face when they cross the line of good taste, discipline and excessive sexual and gratuitous violent content.

Finally, with the exception of the rare larger-than-life news story (and later, I will relate to you I believe there are only two of those remaining in U.S. wrestling), we will stay focused on our roots: television. It is my field of experience over the past 25 years, despite a well-known caustic critic (whom I have never met) who snipes all I have ever done in the field is offer the time and temperature. Many days, I wish that were true. You who know me know better. I will try to analyze, based on my years in TV news and sports. I am no longer affiliated with any promotion's hotline or ancillary enterprise. I am proud to be a regular on the newly-created independent venture, *The Real Wrestling Hotline*. Hopefully, with this being only a monthly venture, more can afford the price of a subscription.

I hope this will be a fun revival, no matter the teetering-on-the-brink road of TV wrestling. We will reinforce one truth: wrestling is not brain surgery or the end of the world. Don't let it get out of perspective---or in control of your life.

STEVE BEVERLY

WCW's Bischoff Era

Continued from Page 1

***De-emphasized Teddy Long, the only regular minority broadcast face on WCW's air, to a point of near-invisibility.

***Convinced the company to tape a 12-week cycle of *WCW Worldwide* at Disney-MGM studios in Florida over a four-day period in July.

***Introduced newcomer Catherine White as a feature reporter in a tasteless series of sequences "in search of Cactus Jack" (see page 3).

***Inserted and removed himself as host of the *Saturday Power Hour* and slotted himself as the *Clash* and pay-per-view "host."

Analyzing Bischoff's performance is somewhat like evaluating Bill Clinton's first five months in office. For every victory---of which there are few---we have seen three steps to the rear.

Realistically, any time a creative change occurs in any

COMMENTARY

form of news, sports or entertainment, ratings typically regress before they improve, if, in fact, improvement comes. When your local TV market changes news anchors, no matter how heavy the hype, early returns are usually weaker because viewers angered by change tend to tune out quicker and in larger numbers than new-found samplers.

The Ross move had to be the worst debacle involving a mat host since Gordon Solie's abrupt displacement as the top TBS NWA voice by Schiavone in 1985. Regardless of internal feelings concerning Ross---many of which were political---WCW not only owed Jim but the viewers, as well, an opportunity for a proper on-air sendoff. Despite his disagreement with being removed, Ross was willing to handle the issue with class. For Schiavone to suddenly pop up again with no explanation to the casual viewer, as he did in 1985, cheated the audience.

Suggesting Schiavone is a superior replacement for Ross is like suggesting *Jeopardy!* with Alex Trebek is better than the original *Jeopardy!* with Art Fleming. (Note: *Schiavone's performance will be reviewed in next month's issue*).

Shifting Ventura to the *Saturday Night* series is a plus for TBS viewers. However, it dilutes the entire concept of providing watchers something different on cable from syndication. And contrary to prevailing views, the chemistry is unbalanced between Schiavone and Ventura for a primary reason: Ventura walks all over Schiavone, who rarely challenges Jesse and never offers aggressive counterpoint when Ventura boosts the heels.

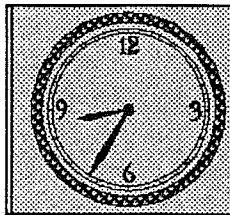
If Bischoff influenced the lighting, set and overall production values of *A Flair for the Gold*, he gets an "A," though underrated WCW production manager Keith Mitchell is probably the unsung creative type who has shaped and accomplished the look. How-

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COMING SOON!!!!

JIM'S BAKE SALE

A Joint Venture of Wrestling Fans to Bail
WCW Out of Its Financial Deficit



As Time Goes By

The prelim estimates for *King-of-the-Ring* are not good for the WWF. Early reports (not official for another 45 days) put the show with a 1.1 per cent buy-rate, or 230,000 homes. That would be a \$5.7 million gross, about \$2.5 million of which would go to Titan Sports. But it's \$2 million under hoped-for estimates....Despite indie cable estimates of an 0.4 per cent buy-rate for *Slamboree*, WCW claims an 0.7, which would outpoint *Starrcade*. If WCW's figures are correct, the show would have been seen in 147,000 homes (a \$2.95 million gross). About \$1 million would reach WCW coffers.

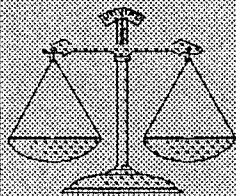
Already, we have a CORRECTION to make---in advance. In the page 5 story on The Real Wrestling Hotline, the number is listed as 1-900-909-9030. It SHOULD be 1-900-903-9030. I *indeed* want you to call the correct one.....We'll examine this more in a later issue but expect a major organization to begin planning a 24-hour mat channel for the predicted 500-channel fiber optic cable universe by 1998....Tor Berg doing decent home vidbiz with his *Best of LPWA* tapes. He's also dickering for a package of ring classics not seen since the mid-1980s.

Joe Pedicino's revival of his *Superstars of Wrestling* marathon in Atlanta still hinges on WTLK, Ch. 14 (licensed to Rome, headquartered in Marietta) getting a pickup by Wometco Cable in Atlanta.....WCW's check for its hotline in April dipped to \$14,000, lowest one-month figure ever. That's down from \$127,000 a year ago.

We hope to return to the full fold-out format for *Matwatch '93*, once the subscriber base rises....Thanks to Ed Simpkins and old friend Vinnie Carolan for a nice time on their *Wrestling Radio U.S.A.* show June 19.

On the June 19 USWA show, Jerry Lawler explained away his attack on Bret Hart as the same old "WWF-is-the-bad-guy-trying-to-steal-my-trademark 'King'-name-and-I'm-just-defending-the-USWA." After all these years, does Lawler still think he's fooling anyone but children???...Enjoyed the newest video out from Verne Langdon's *Slammers Gym*.

Times change dept.: ever consider how five years ago, you'd have screamed if WCW *Main Event* was pre-empted two weeks in a row as it was recently. Now, do you care?....WCW now projects a \$2 million overall loss this year. Next month, we'll discuss a proposal to bail the company out of the deficit: a bake sale. You'll love the details!....Ever wonder what brand of hair lacquer Bischoff uses? Turn him upside down and that hair wouldn't budge. FSB.



MATWATCH '93

EDITORIAL



nabashedly, we admit to being politically incorrect. We emphatically disagree with the liberal thought police who would tell us what to say and how to say it to whom. We like to laugh. We think America has lost its tasteful sense of humor. But there are

some issues in which satire is as appropriate as a Correctol moment.

The June 5 WCW *Saturday Night* sketch which introduced feature reporter Catherine White on the prowl in an alleged mental institution for Cactus Jack is indicative of how low Ted Turner's organization has sunk. The sequel on June 12 was almost in the same cesspool.

When Mick Foley created his Cactus Jack character along Eastern independents in the late '80s, he incorporated a combination of Terry Funk, Norman and a soft-around-the-edges Charles Manson in his persona. But not even Mick could be happy with the tone of these WCW skits.

The segment, in which Ms. White quizzed "patients" at the "asylum" in a failed search for Cactus was an insult to the intelligence of even the least-educated of viewers.

According to insiders, the plan of WCW creative gurus Ole Anderson and Dusty Rhodes is to have Cactus return from his "injury" at the hands of Big Van Vader as an amnesias, who forgets all about becoming a fan favorite.

Some analysts are already raising the question: if Cactus has amnesia, how does he selectively remember to return to World Championship Wrestling? That aside, the sketches are an abomination for two overriding reasons.

First, on a creative scale, the Cactus search is an example of what happens when scriptwriters, as WCW chief Bill Shaw and Eric Bischoff have hired, get control of creative content in wrestling. The two male "patients" interviewed were two of WCW's new scribes.

On an even more distasteful note, the initial segment alone was a slur to any family who has ever dealt with the trauma of emotional illness. This was not even a weak attempt at "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." For five minutes, WCW trivialized an illness which strikes more than 20 million Americans and attempted to equate it with fun and games on TV. Its lack of taste has nothing to do with political correctness.

The editor of *Matwatch '93* has served on the West Tennessee Board of Mental Health. We have seen success stories on the road back from emotional setbacks. We have seen firsthand the toll that road takes. To satirize the Cactus Jack situation is utterly contemptible.

Matwatch '93 believes the responsibility goes beyond the Bischoff-Rhodes-Anderson-scriptwriter level. Bill Shaw, this is your company. If this is your idea of humor or of boosting ratings, you owe an apology to the scores of families who cope daily with emotional trauma. Particularly when as head of human services for TBS, you are supposed to be committed to fairness for the handicapped. Decency dictates you end these segments immediately. If decency still exists in World Championship Wrestling.

(July editorial: a hotline which has become a sex line).

THE RATINGS PAGE

CABLE WRESTLING RATINGS

Averages for May	Rating/Share	Total Homes	Nat. Rank
Monday Night Raw	2.7/4.0	1.613 million	
WWF All-American	2.1/6.9	1.215 million	
WCW Saturday Night	2.0/4.9	1.215 million	
WCW Main Event	1.9/4.3	1.119 million	
WCW Power Hour	1.3/5.3	776,000	
WWF Mania	1.1/3.8	640,000	

Week Ending May 17

Monday Night Raw (5/17)	2.9/4.1	1.736 million	11
WWF All-American (5/16)	2.6/7.7	1.548 million	19
WCW Main Event (5/16)	2.2/4.7	1.296 million	35
WCW Saturday Night (5/15)	2.0/5.3	1.214 million	47
WCW Power Hour (5/15)	1.2/4.9	726,000	
WWF Mania (5/15)	1.0/3.8	603,000	

Week Ending May 24

Monday Night Raw (5/24)	2.7/4.0	1.63 million	13
WWF All-American (5/23)	2.6/8.0	1.57 million	18
WCW Saturday Night (5/22)	2.0/4.1	1.212 million	44
WWF Mania (5/22)	1.3/4.7	787,000	
WCW Power Hour (5/22)	1.2/5.1	727,200	

Week Ending May 31

Monday Night Raw (5/31)	2.6/4.1	1.618 million	17
WCW Saturday Night (5/29)	1.9/5.2	1.161 million	44
WWF All-American (5/30)	1.9/5.7	1.136 million	46
WCW Power Hour (5/29)	1.1/4.7	667,000	
WWF Mania (5/29)	0.8/2.9	484,000	

Week Ending June 7

Monday Night Raw (6/7)	2.5/3.8	1.507 million	N/A
WWF All-American (6/6)	2.4/7.3	1.446 million	24
WCW Saturday Night (6/5)	2.0/4.5	1.206 million	50
WCW Power Hour (6/5)	1.3/5.1	780,400	
WWF Mania (6/5)	0.8/2.6	482,100	

Week Ending June 14

Monday Night Raw (6/14)	2.8/4.6	1.686 million	N/A
WWF All-American (6/13)	2.2/7.1	1.324 million	N/A
WCW Saturday Night (6/12)	2.0/5.5	1.2 million	N/A
WCW Main Event (6/13)	1.7/4.3	1.021 million	N/A
WWF Mania (6/12)	1.1/4.1	662,200	
WCW Power Hour (6/12)	1.0/4.6	600,000	

THE REAL WRESTLING HOTLINE

Meltzer (M-W-F), Beverly (Tu-Sa), Arezzi (Su)

1-900-903-9030

WHAT THEY MEAN

We'll offer a refresher course in terms and analysis of the television industry, in regard to wrestling, in the coming months. In case you are still confused, a rating is the percentage of all of the television households in America (but for cable, it is the percentage of all cable TV homes in the U.S.). If 100,000 homes have cable in a community and 1,000 are tuned in to *WWF Monday Night Raw*, then *Raw* scores a one per cent rating.

The share is the percentage of homes tuned in to a specific show out of all of the cable TV homes with the set turned on at that hour. If 20,000 cable homes are turned on at the 9 p.m. hour Mondays and 1,000 are watching *Raw*, then the *WWF* program draws a five per cent share.

To figure total homes, at the moment, USA Cable is seen in 60.2 million homes and TBS in an even 60 million. So multiply approximately 600,000 homes for every rating point a TBS show draws; 602,000 homes for a USA rating.

PROJECTING THE CLASH

Thursday night's *Clash of the Champions* was a ratings disaster on all fronts. The 2.6 rating and 1.549 million homes were the worst figures in the five-year history of the specials. Even last June's poor taped *Clash* drew a 2.8. Last January's event was the third-worst with a 2.9/4.2, seen in only 1.78 million homes. The dismal outing supports our view that not even the return of Ric Flair to the ring can bring viewers back.

Typically, the *Clash* specials attract about 61 per cent more viewers than the average rating for the previous Saturday evening show. But this show leveraged only a 30 per cent bump. Certainly, TBS officials will take a long look at the value of the *Clash*. WCW chief Bill Shaw, unless totally blind, has to begin re-evaluating his front office.

FINAL NOTES

Monday Night Raw has a 16-week winning streak in the ratings, as of June 14, longest in four years....For Bischoff's 16 weeks as WCW executive producer, he is averaging a 2.1 for *Saturday Night*, down from the 2.18 for the nine weeks of Kip Frey in 1992....We've added a new column: national rank. Each week, we'll list where the major shows finish in the national cable top 100 of all programs.

MATWATCH '93 SUBSCRIPTIONS

A three-month subscription to *Matwatch '93* is \$5.00 for three issues. Single copies are \$1.75. Check, cash or money order to: STEVE BEVERLY, 16 ROBIN HOOD LANE, JACKSON TN 38305. International rate: \$9.00 for three issues.

Please make checks payable to STEVE BEVERLY and NOT to *Matwatch '93*. For initial subscribers, a three-month GIFT subscription to someone other than yourself entitles you to ONE bonus monthly issue of *Matwatch '93*!!!

MATWATCH '93

PAGE 5 VOL. 1, NO. 1 JUNE 1993

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Op. 1	Meltzer	Beverly	Meltzer	Cornette	Meltzer	Beverly	Arezzi
Op. 2	WCW Ns.	SMW Ns.	USWA Ns.	Clark	T. Funk	Paul E.	WWF Ns.

Real Wrestling Hotline Offers Real News

It doesn't have access to a national television show for promotion. It doesn't have five years of history behind it. But The Real Wrestling Hotline, which began operations May 29, presents one of the most diverse group of mat journalists and personalities ever for a 900-number wrestling phone service.

On option one, The Wrestling Observer's Dave Meltzer is the keynote host three days a week on TRWH. Meltzer updates up to seven minutes of national and world mat news Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Meltzer includes a diet of Japan headlines, along with notes on U.S. promotions, particularly morning-after news from TV tapings.

Matwatch '93 editor Steve Beverly, who left the WCW Hotline in May, offers "900 Matwatch" on Saturdays---three daily updates of the day's television wrestling news, including a morning news update and preview of the day's shows; an afternoon segment (usually recorded between 12:30 and 2 p.m. EDT) focusing on the morning's live USWA show in Memphis; and an evening update centering around late news, WCW Saturday Night and the key WWF shows of the day. All three segments offer a commentary on a key television issue.

Beverly returns Tuesdays with "The Way Things Ought to Be," a pointed commentary, and the week's cable television ratings for pro wrestling.

New York radio journalist John Arezzi presents "Pro Wrestling Spotlight" Sundays, often with key information from interviews on his Big Apple radio show from the evening before.

Veteran manager Jim Cornette offers his "Louisville Lip" Thursdays, focusing on his Smoky Mountain promotion and frequently answering the mainline journalists on the previous commentaries.

Option two features a grab bag of features and personalities on various promotions. The lineup includes Georgiann Makropoulos (Wrestling

Chatterbox) with a WWF report; Mondays, former Global co-host Scott Hudson with a WCW report; Tuesdays, Dutch Mantell with a Smoky Mountain update; Wednesdays, Mantell with USWA highlights; Thursdays, teen journalist John Clark with mat personality interviews (his premiere was a past interview with Kerry Von Erich); Fridays, Terry Funk with "Funk's Grill," with Terry commenting on assorted issues in the industry; and Saturdays, Paul E. Dangerously's "Danger Zone," with frequent previews of Dangerously's new Dallas-based promotion, scheduled to be taped for High Definition Television.

Three other options include "Starspower," a wrestling horoscope segment; "Tic-Tac-Toehold," a game option to play against Dangerously; and Q-and-A, where you can leave a question for a hotline segment host.

A sixth option will feature live roundtable forums, which will include Meltzer, Beverly, Arezzi and other key mat personalities on the night of key pay-per-view and TBS "Clash" specials. Dates will be promoted in Matwatch '93.

Should late-breaking news develop in any day, each reporter has the ability to update the day's message from a previous report.

The service is not a subsidiary of or funded by any existing pro wrestling promotion and the ring performers (Cornette, Dangerously, Funk and Mantel) are paid by TRWH, not by any wrestling company.

The 24-hour number is 1-900-909-9030. Calls cost 99 cents per minute. Veteran wrestling announcer Lance Russell is a consultant to the hotline and introduces each of the segment hosts.

WCW: THE BISCHOFF ERA

(Continued from Page 2)

ever, the content--which will be reviewed next month--was little more in the first five weeks than a tribute to Flair's libido. The overt sexual tones were hardly appropriate for the family hour. The delivery of a stripper--who pushed the envelope of TBS standards for early evening--to Flair's penthouse by Rick Rude in week five drew howls of non-hardcore fan protest.

Teddy Long may have little more than a negligible impact on ratings. But few who know how seriously Teddy takes his role as community liaison for WCW in Atlanta can argue Long has not been a plus for the company. Yet, until recent reappearances on *Saturday Night*, reportedly at the behest of operations chief Ole Anderson, Bischoff had virtually obliterated Long from the air.

Teddy has been presented a letter of commendation by former President Carter for his work with Habitat for Human-

ity. Has this specifically been mentioned on WCW? No. For a company which dumped Bill Watts for published remarks concerning race, one would think Bischoff would leave no lid uncovered in getting Long air time.

The idea of mass advance tapings of *WCW Worldwide* between pay-per-views and the next *Clash* have already been pooh-pooed in assorted quarters. The only two WCW executives who appear to view it as a plus

are Shaw and Bischoff. But those are the only views which matter for the company. One only has to draw from Eddie Einhorn's 1974-75 IWA promotion, the first legit effort at a mass national promotion, to see the fallacy. Einhorn opened by taping 17 hours of TV in two days in Savannah, Ga. By the time stations were halfway through the 17-week cycle, some performers were no longer with the IWA. Wrestlers advertised for an IWA national tour often did not appear because of injuries or departures. Guess that doesn't matter to Bischoff. The leaving of an eight-minute "hole" in each episode to update angles or storylines appears risky, considering this group's perennial inconsistency.

Bischoff has made a proper move in removing himself from *Power Hour*, though he needs to do the same on pay-per-view shows and TBS specials. As e.p., to place himself as host of any WCW show makes him guilty of the same sins he and assorted WCW insiders excoriated Ross for during his Atlanta years. If Bischoff is going to adequately concentrate on the product in progress, he should not be distracted as an active performer. Why do you think Vince McMahon removes himself as host of most of his pay-per-view shows?

Most disturbing is the way Bischoff has approached this job. While few argue the need to be assertive in a demanding role, insiders say Bischoff demonstrates what can only be described as arrogance. He appears to act on and off-air as if he's the George Stephanopoulos of WCW. Boni Blackstone's audition with WCW is a key example. Bischoff offered Boni would "never get a job with WCW" because of her Southern accent and trashed Ross likewise. Interesting, isn't it, that McMahon did not find that a liability for Blackstone or Ross?

Further, Bischoff has openly stated that since he has become "bi-coastal" (in this case, a regular traveler between Atlanta and Los Angeles), he has become all too aware of how "Southern" WCW shows were. Interesting that it takes frequent flier miles to educate one.

Additionally, as short on announcers as WCW is, Bischoff has an experienced play-by-play man in both wrestling and mainline sports right in his own building: Jon (Craig Johnson) Horton, a producer for CNN Newsource, a daily sports feed. Bischoff won't approach him. Why? According to Eric, Craig is too tall. As if one has never heard of chairs to neutralize height. This reeks of Hollywood-style arrogance to the point you'd think Bischoff is bucking for an invitation to the White House.

The recent scriptwriter tactics involving the Cactus Jack storyline is well-detailed in the page 3 editorial.

The story goes that Bischoff is holding off until September to introduce his "major changes." With ratings even lower on the weekly shows than the aborted Kip Frey era and a disaster in the most recent *Clash*, one wonders if Bischoff can afford the wait. Then, again, maybe he plans to hire Lani Guiniere to help him. After all, she gained a lot of recent attention for proposing drastic changes. Then, again, we know what happened to her.

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16 ROBIN HOOD LANE
JACKSON, TN 38305